

NOTE: When I wrote this Woodie only had a beaver form, judge accordingly.

Oh no there were splinters and wood shavings everywhere!

Woodie sat up, cradling his aching head in his hands. Another full moon had come and gone. Another swath of forest had gone. He'd have to get back to Lucy. She must be so frantic!

He staggered to his feet. One of the logs strewn across the ground moved.

Woodie jerked back. First the trees had come alive to punish him - now their logs were, too? If only Lucy were here! Wait, that wasn't a log. That was log armor.

Wilson sat up, blinking. Apart from maybe WX-78, Wilson was the last person in camp Woodie would want to know his secret. Had he seen?

Wilson's eyes were bright. There was a big bite missing out of the side of his armor. He stood up and grabbed Woodie's wrists. Eyugh! His hands felt like rotting wood after a cold rain.

"That was incredible! I've never seen anything like it. Not even on this island! Your physiology must be exquisite. You ripped through this entire acre of forest! And ten frogs!" Wilson gestured expansively at a reddish patch of ground about twenty meters away. "I thought I was a goner. And then you- it- but I'm sorry. You look tired. Such a transformation must draw on your energy something awful! Here." He helped Woodie to sit down on a tree stump.

Woodie hung his head and took a few deep breaths. Wilson lightly patted his shoulder. "With your power," Wilson mused, "we'll be able to do so much more. The spider nests blocking the way to the gold fields, for example-"

He was making plans?

“I don’t want to be this way!” Woodie blurted.

Wilson cocked his head. “You don’t? Why?” His brow furrowed. “Is it painful?”

“I don’t like it, is all,” he hedged.

“Really. Hm. You don’t want to transform?”

Woodie stared at the ground and shrugged.

“Well, then.” Wilson patted his arm. “We’ll just have to make it stop happening. I’m sure Wickerbottom knows some way to-”

“No, don’t tell her! I don’t want anyone to know!”

Wilson took a step back, folding his arms over his chest and frowning. Woodie thought for a moment that he was getting angry but then he remembered that Wilson usually looked like that.

“Then I’ll have to do it myself. It’ll take a bit longer. Not much longer! Er- when do you change? What triggers the change?”

Woodie cleared his throat and shuffled his feet. He didn’t know what to think about this. He had to tell Lucy and see what she thought. “I’ll tell you later, eh, I’ve got ta get back to camp and take care of a few things, you know. I’ll see you.”

He staggered off into the woods with Wilson watching in confusion.

“Oh,” he said. “Okay.”

He wants to fix you? More like he wants to make you into some kind of experiment. Don’t let him do it! Lucy fretted.

“I dunno, Lucy.” Woodie was sitting with his back against a tree, watching the sunset. Everything was deceptively peaceful. “I can handle him if he tries anything, eh? If he can help, you know...” Mounded, fluffy clouds drifted past, their undersides glowing with the last of the sun.

Well, said Lucy, *I want you to be happy*.

Woodie got up and dusted off his pants.

The problem was finding him. Woodie had never sought someone out on the island before. He just stayed in his camp or traveled through the forests, or once in a while went to the main camp for a bite to eat when his own stores were empty. People ran into him, or he ran into them- or he didn't and they didn't, and that was fine. At least he knew where the others usually were- but Wilson and Willow's camp was deserted.

Woodie did a cursory exploration- not enough to find anything private, just to make sure no one was there and see if anyone had left a note or anything. The only note he found was on the ice box. SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT. NOT EDIBLE!!! Not very helpful, either.

He headed towards the main camp. On the way he heard female voices. Willow and Wigfrid were coming down the path, chatting.

"Nooo! You always take the organs out and use them for bait! You don't eat them," Willow laughed.

"The liver is a delicious part of any meat feast!"

"People have died from eating livers, you nut!"

They looked like chummy schoolgirls.

Woodie stood by the path and cleared his throat when they passed.

"Ye-e-es?" Willow asked pleasantly.

"Do you need something killed, fair forest dweller?" Wigfrid asked.

"No, er, I was wonderin' if you know where Wilson is?" Woodie asked Willow.

"Well, I don't know exactly where he is, but he told me he found a clearing where a Deerclops or something had knocked a ton of trees over, and it was north of

here. He said he was going to go gather some of the wood. Why d'ou wanna talk to him?" Her tone was interrogative. Slightly suspicious.

Tell her you lent him something, Lucy suggested.

"He was borrowin' some of my tools and I wanted to, uh, see if he was done with 'em."

Willow shook her head. "He'll never remember to give those back. Here, I got some extras, what do you need?"

"I'd rather ask him," Woodie stammered.

Willow shrugged. "Suit yourself. He'll never remember, though."

A clear area up north. That had to be the place from last night. Sure enough, Woodie walked into the wasteland of felled trees to find Wilson harvesting the gnawed wood.

His head popped up so fast that his hair bounced. "Woodie! Hello. I was just-" He looked down at the armful of logs he was holding. "Wait. This is yours, isn't it?"

"That's alright," Woodie demurred.

"You harvested it," Wilson said.

"No, you can take it"

"If you're sure?"

"I'm sure. I came here to, uh, to say that maybe it'd be all right if you took a shot at the whole curse thing, eh?"

"Oh!" Wilson dropped all of the logs he was holding on the spot and stood up straight. "Well, then, we- ah," he said, a noise of pain that was moderated, almost contemplative, and he touched his side. "Sorry, that's nothing. Let's get to work, shall we?" His waistcoat was torn.

Woodie had bitten into his log armor on that side. He squirmed. “Did I did I do that?”

Wilson shook his head, though his eyes were shift. “I don’t think so. Actually, definitely not. Nope. Come here! Let’s get your measurements to start with!” He was practically bouncing up and down. He took something out of his backpack.

“Is that a measuring tape?”

“Science starts with measurements, you know!”

“Where did you get that?”

“Where do I get anything?” He began to take various measurements- the length from Woodie’s collarbone to his waist, the length of his arms, the length of his legs. “My hands are cold, sorry,” he muttered.

“That’s alright-” Woodie mumbled in response, and then he flinched as Wilson’s hand brushed his arm. His hands *were* cold. This was like being at the doc’s. In the middle of nowhere.

“So! How long has this been going on?” Wilson asked.

“A while.”

“Were you born this way?”

“No,” Woodie hedged.

The legend of the Perfect Axe had been passed through camps of lumberjacks for generations. It was deep in the woods, they said. And it had been. Deep in the heart of the woods, in the ice and snow, there She had been. Lucy. The Perfect Axe. And there had also been a beaver statue, with glowing eyes

“Do you have any idea how you got this way?” Wilson asked.

“No,” Woodie said. Lucy didn’t know. And he would keep it that way. He didn’t want her to feel bad.

Wilson had finished measuring and now he put the tape away and jotted down what he'd learned in his notes. "When do you transform?"

"When it's the full moon or when I chop trees too fast," he said. This felt weird, saying this kind of thing out loud. He'd never told a soul before.

Wilson nodded. "Maybe for the time being, you should stop chopping down trees and see if-"

"No," Woodie said firmly.

Wilson raised an eyebrow. "No? Very well..." He tapped the end of his stick of charcoal against the paper, nibbling on his lower lip. "You really don't want Wickerbottom to know, eh?"

"You can't tell anyone!"

"Alright! That's fine." His voice dropped to a mutter. "I don't have a stethoscope, I don't have my tools-" He perked up. "May I draw some blood?"

"I'd really- prefer-" Woodie stammered.

"All right, fine. I won't," said Wilson. He shook his head. "This would be much easier with a laboratory. However! All is not lost... what do you experience when you transform? What's it like?"

"Well, I don't remember it afterwards, y'know."

"I see. Are you aware of what's going on around you when you're in your other form? Do you remember that part?"

"Only a little bit."

Wilson seemed to be taking all of this in stride. And it seemed like he was doing his best to be helpful- or maybe he was just eager to have a subject. "What do you usually eat?"

"Same as you, eh? Whatever I can get."

“Makes sense.” Wilson ran his fingers through his hair. He had such thick hair. “I can start brainstorming now and I can tell you’re busy. I’ll see you tomorrow, perhaps, and touch base?”

“Sure.”

Wilson popped to his feet and winced. He started to reach for his side and stopped himself. Woodie also winced. Wilson shook his head and gathered up some wood. “See you in the morning!” He carried the wood away.

Looking around, it was like he hadn’t taken any of it. At least a three-kilometer area had been decimated. The ground was covered in gnawed lumps of wood two layers deep.

I know what you’re thinking, Woodie, Lucy said. You didn’t hurt that man.

“I did,” Woodie said. “I saw his armor. I bit clear through it.”

You would never hurt anyone. It was an accident. It wasn’t you doing it.

“I hope he can stop this, you know?”

I know.

Woodie headed into their camp shortly after dawn. Willow was roasting some cactus flesh over the fire.

“Hey” she said. “You didn’t get your tools back, huh? I’ll get you some.”

“No, uh, I got them, but he wants me to show him the good trees today, eh?”

Woodie said.

“Well, I think he’s going to cancel,” said Willow. “He said he’s not feeling good. Something bit him and I think it’s infected.”

There were rustling sounds inside one of the tents (the shoddier, messier one) and Wilson appeared, blinking. “What’s going on? Oh, hello, Woodie,” he said.

“He said you were going to go out today and I told him you can’t go out,” said Willow.

“Of course I can go out. I told you, it’s not infected,” Wilson insisted. He was holding his side.

“You said you had a fever,” said Willow.

“It’s gone. I can go now, Woodie! It’ll only take a moment. I’ll be back for breakfast.”

“If he passes out,” Willow said, “just leave him in the dirt, Woodie.” Wilson made a dismissive noise.

“What’s this about a bite then?” Woodie asked as they were heading away.

“Aaah, well, it’s nothing, really. It’s a bit sore, that’s all,” said Wilson. “Anyway, about your problem. I have an idea. But it will take some time to get everything together. The secret is in the wood. I’m going to need lots and lots of wood.” He rubbed his palms together. “Come back in a week.”

A prickle ran up the back of Woodie’s neck. “The full moon’s in a week.”

A slow smile spread over Wilson’s ghoul-pale face. “I know.”

The structure had been built in the place where Woodie had turned. It was a big, loggy thing. It looked like a half-built box. Not very impressive.

“Okay, there’s not much time.” Wilson was swinging a canteen back and forth in one hand. He looked pale, or maybe that was the fading light.

“Sorry, eh, treeguard.”

“Don’t apologize to me, I’m not the one who’s about to have a problem,” he said, though he looked like he might be- he was sweating bullets. Gross, eh? “You have to be in that when the transformation starts. Get in!” He pointed dramatically.

Woodie stepped into the thing. There were huge lengths of wood hanging down over his head like ribs.

Wilson pulled a switch. Nothing happened. "Come on," Wilson snapped, pulling the switch up and down and up again. Sweat glistened on his forehead. "Not even a spark?"

The moon came up. It was starting. Power was welling up inside Woodie. He couldn't fight it. It was a power stronger than any man- the power of the beaver!

With the last of his human vision, he saw Wilson collapse on the ground with a strangled cry. The beaver saw food. Food in a square. On all sides, left and right, above him and below. He began to eat the food.

Danger.

A shadow rose from the ground. The thing was enormous and covered in black hair. Twice the size of the beaver, at least. But the beaver knew no fear. The two beasts met in combat. The big beast had foot-long claws, when the beaver had only his incisors. But the claws were blunt and the monster was clumsy.

The beaver locked onto its throat and threw it to the ground. Writhing, the monster dove into the ground and disappeared. The man, Woodie, would have worried that the beast would come back, perhaps with a friend. The beaver was beyond such worries. The beaver could smell trees.

Trees!

Woodie woke up next to a fallen tree trunk. He sat up, holding his head. The destruction of the forest was wide. But there was something else. Something he was forgetting... it wouldn't come to mind.

He picked himself up and started heading back in the direction of the invention. On the way, he found something in the ground. It was a trail. Like a slug trail, if a slug was the size of a small car. He followed the trail to its end. There were holes, pits and trenches in the ground as far as the eye could see. They been scooped out with claws.

A were-moleworm.

The trail led to a bushy-headed form spread out facedown on the ground. Woodie squatted down next to him and gently shook his shoulder.

Wilson's voice was muffled. "I think I ate a rock."

"Sorry," Woodie said.

"More than one rock."

"This is all my fault."

"Well, they're better than my mother's cooking." Wilson pushed himself up off the ground. "My invention... it didn't work. I think it backfired." His usual buoyant manic energy was gone. His voice sounded flat.

"I bit you," Woodie said.

"There's no scientific evidence that lycanthropy- er- castanthropy is spread through bites," said Wilson.

"There isn't?"

"There's no scientific data on any of it at all," said Wilson. "I'll try again next month and get all this fixed." He rolled his head from side to side to work out a kink in his neck. "Now if you will excuse me, I need to take a bath. Somehow. I am covered in mud." He staggered off.

Lucy was lying on the ground. Woodie picked her up and rubbed the flat of her blade against his cheek.